



The Testimony of Ted G. Kamatchus
Sheriff of Marshall County, Iowa
Before the House of Representatives Committee on Energy and Commerce
Joint Hearing of the Subcommittee on Health and
Subcommittee on Environment and Hazardous Materials
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Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

My name is Ted Kamatchus and I am the Sheriff of Marshall County, Iowa. I would like to thank the members of this distinguished panel for inviting me to Washington and allowing me to share my experience with you regarding the National Methamphetamine problem. I am a 29-year veteran of law enforcement and am in my 18th year serving my county as it's' sheriff. I currently serve as the 1st Vice-President of the National Sheriffs' Association. You will find my professional bio in your packets.

If you would indulge me, I would like to read briefly from the testimony I presented to Congress in 1999.

"Make no mistake about it. We are facing one of the worst drug problems America has ever confronted. In the 1980's, the drug of choice was cocaine. In the early 1990's, we faced a heroin epidemic and now at the close of the century with the dawn of a new millennium, we confront efforts to legalize marijuana as we face an international invasion of methamphetamine.

Meth (or crank) is one of the greatest challenges we face as law enforcement officers. Meth labs are highly toxic, environmental disasters. The chemicals used in the production of crank are volatile and enforcement activity at a lab must be handled with extreme caution. One wrong move could touch off an explosion. As sheriff, a locally elected law enforcement official, I have a unique perspective on this new epidemic. I have been to meth labs. I have been on drug raids and I have purchased crank by the pound in undercover operations. I have seen first hand how this highly addictive drug destroys our kids and I have had to visit too many homes to try and explain to parents that their teenager just died of an overdose. We must do something to stem the tide of illegal drugs, especially meth."

That is how I began testimony before a similar committee in Congress on March 24, 1999. Just prior to that testimony, my community had received national attention through an article published in U.S. News and World Report magazine. The article had discussed the trafficking of Methamphetamine into the heartland of America and how Marshall County was the epicenter of that process. The

writer had actually infiltrated Mexican Drug Cartels and found direct links of two cartels to our area.

As a result of efforts by the National Sheriffs' Association and other national law enforcement associations, we were able to convince the Congress of the United States to maximize funding for our efforts in fighting drugs in America. Emphasis was placed on the infiltration of Methamphetamine from abroad. As a result, huge seizures of product occurred and 2 of the 4 primary drug cartels involved sustained major set-backs. These setbacks greatly decreased the availability of Methamphetamine to the users in our area.

There is no a-typical user of Meth in our country. From the rich and famous to individuals on the street, all have seemed to find a purpose in selecting Meth as their drug of choice. As major suppliers were slowed or eliminated, addicted users turned to other means of supplying their habits. It was these addicts who were driven to find fuel for their addictions by developing small local "user" labs for the product. The majority of these labs utilized the Nazi "cold cook" method of manufacturing the drug. Primarily using the internet as a reference book, home grown "chemists" or "cooks" began sprouting up throughout the country.

You will note in your packets the growth of labs in the State of Iowa. The total number of Meth labs seized during the year 1994 was 2. The total number of labs seized in 2004 was 1,472. When considering issues of major impact

brought before the Congress, I would imagine that few statistical indicators have ever jumped at such an alarming pace.

But what does this mean? What is the true impact on our society? Over the past 10 years, I have grown to learn more about this issue than I would have ever cared to learn. Let me take a few moments to discuss with you some figures compiled by the Iowa Office of Drug Control Policy. Please understand this is an issue that is rapidly spreading across our country. It no longer resides solely in the Midwest! The fingers of its use and abuse are seen reaching throughout the East coast. As I read you the numbers we have found in Iowa, you only have to pause a moment to consider the huge long term economic and environmental impact it will have on the rest of our country.

What is Meth?

Although I am sure you have a better understanding than the average citizen, I want to do all I can to give a complete overview of Methamphetamine so that anyone who may monitor or read this testimony will possess as complete an understanding of the problem as possible.

Meth is made with common chemicals such as; ether; sodium hydroxide (lye); drain cleaner; lithium (from Batteries); red phosphorus (from matchbooks and flares); camping fuel; and pseudoephedrine. While there are many different recipes for making methamphetamine all mixtures include one common and

essential ingredient: pseudoephedrine. If you aren't aware of pseudoephedrine, it also is one of the primary ingredients in cold, sinus and allergy medications. The molecular structure of it is only 1 step away from methamphetamine. The mixture of the aforementioned precursors causes the transformation of that structure into the poison we call Meth.

But it is more than the drug itself that is of concern. The remaining byproducts from the process of "cooking" meth are equally as dangerous. The impact this refuse has on the environment and fiscal budgets of those agencies taxed to clean it up is enormous. Latest studies have shown that the direct cost to Iowa law enforcement officials for cleanup and disposal of the labs during FY- 2004 was \$2,923,144. And the impact that meth abuse has had on the substance abuse treatment process in Iowa exceeded \$ 7 million dollars during that same period.

Methamphetamine has been shown to serve as the primary drug of choice of 15.8% of those in non-criminal drug and mental health treatment in Iowa during FY- 2004. That same study clearly indicated that Meth users are "poly" drug users involved in a wide array of drug use and abuse. However, keep in mind, that methamphetamine use is NOT just an Iowa problem.

Socio-economic impact study

A study conducted by the Oklahoma Department of Public Safety clearly showed the grand scale of this problem. The study conducted this past year was developed through a survey of known Meth users and manufacturers. It took into consideration the Socio-Economic impact of Meth labs in the state.

Consideration was given to mental health, child welfare, treatment, court and correctional costs, investigation and apprehension costs, job retention, property damage and Meth lab clean up.

The average attributed impact of cost on the system for each Meth lab seized was \$350,000 annually. In addition, impacts on the family structure, unborn children, educational system and sustaining health care were NOT figured into the equation.

When you multiply this amount by the 1,200+ labs seized by Oklahoma authorities or the 1,400+ seized by Iowa authorities the fiscal impact becomes evident. It should be noted, that since the inception of Iowa's strict pseudoephedrine purchasing law, we have experienced a 78% reduction in Meth labs as compared to the same period in 2004.

Impact on our families

In addition, the emotional impact on the citizens of our country is extreme. Family breakdowns and the loss of loved ones who poison themselves through addiction are greater with Methamphetamine than any other illegal drug.

- In Burlington, Iowa a 14-year old girl died from meth overdose after mixing meth lab residue given to her by her mom's boyfriend with a bottle of pop and then drinking it.
- In Rural Carroll County Iowa an infant nearly died from a baby bottle filled with pseudoephedrine and other meth-making chemicals. They were placed there to hide from authorities.
- In Rural Clay County Iowa a 3-month old was removed from her home where her mother and grandmother and grandmothers' boyfriend cooked and used meth. The meth was cooked in a hidden area next to the baby's room. So toxic was the environment in the room, that all the metal items were corroded due to the acid in the air.
- A Mason City, Iowa little girl was discovered in a family car seated next to a bubbling meth "generator". The vapors of anhydrous ammonia used in the process overwhelmed the interior of the vehicle.
- And then there is the case of Angela Fatino. In your packets you will find a copy of the story printed in the Des Moines Register. It discusses how within one year a bright, involved, beautiful 12 year old girl could fall so low; she would end up in a juvenile detention center and eventually take her own life.

I ask that you take a moment to study the photos so you can more clearly gain an understanding of this cold reality called Meth abuse.

Effects on the user

The drug is unique. It has a higher addiction potential than Heroin with symptoms of paranoia similar to those caused by Cocaine. It possesses the hallucinogenic properties of LSD and individuals on Meth gain adrenal strength much like the PCP addicts of the 70's.

It is less expensive and more addictive than Crack Cocaine and easier to get than marijuana. Methamphetamine can be smoked, eaten, injected, snorted or absorbed. Few, if any other, substances can be abused as easily or are as easy to get as Meth. If you can't buy it, you can make it. All you need is the right over the counter chemicals and an empty 2-liter pop bottle.

Sheriffs see full impact

As a Sheriff, I have a unique chance to be involved in all aspects of law enforcement. Of the over 3,000 Sheriff's Offices in our country the overwhelming majority are full-line agencies. We have community action programs, teach DARE, and enforce motor vehicle and criminal laws while participating in the full gamut of protective services.

But from that point we separate ourselves from the majority of other law enforcement agencies. 98% of the Nations' Sheriffs are elected by the people. We are directly charged by those citizens who elected us, those

same citizens who elected you, to protect and serve the counties and parishes of this nation.

As Sheriffs we are also active in the Civil and Court aspects of law enforcement. We serve civil papers and court actions on individuals who have incurred judgments against them. I have seized homes, vehicles and children from families as a direct result of court action brought upon the defendant due to their drug use. Not just through the forfeiture process but directly resulting from the users spending every last cent to maintain their habit. In addition, the Office of Sheriff is charged with the transporting of mental health and substance abuse committals through court order often originating from illicit drug use.

And, we operate the nations' jails. No individual is accepted into the prison system without first going through a jail at some time in their process. Due to the large national increase in drug users, we find our cost of in-house health care skyrocketing. In my facility, nearly 60% of the inmates are on some form of prescribed medication. With the high toxicity level of Meth, we find that users need far more medical treatment. More and more users must be taken to kidney dialysis or are on anti-psychotic medications so that they can remain stable and capable of fitting into the facility.

A need to band together in support

Ladies and Gentlemen of this Committee, I come before you today to ask your support and assistance. With all the trying times facing this nation, we can ill afford to open the door to more catastrophe and disruption. While our enemies are at our gate, knocking on the door and waiting for us to weaken, we can not allow our nation to destroy itself. This is more than a group of weak individuals using a substance for self pleasure. It is a major part of our society destroying itself and the country's future.

I ask that you give full supporting for efforts currently being considered by Congress that would better fund the fight against Meth and other illicit drugs in America. To take the "War on Drugs" more seriously now than ever before! Legislation is needed to secure pseudoephedrine from over-purchase potential and shoplifting cooks.

We must not turn our backs on those individuals who have dedicated their lives to protecting and serving our citizens. To cut funding of the JAG/Byrne or HIDTA programs will eliminate drug taskforces in 38 of the 50 states in this country. I shudder to think of the ramifications of that occurring with inadequate monitoring and enforcement.

Again, I want thank you for the opportunity to come before you and express my concerns. I have the greatest faith in our system of government and know that through your efforts our country will be stronger and more resilient well into the future.